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COMMUNITY BASED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION: USING THE ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIORAL MODEL TO CREATE OUTREACH AND EDUCATION STRATEGIES RELATED TO HUDSON RIVER CONTAMINANTS

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Community – based environmental health outreach involves activating communities through collaboration with academic scientists to identify solutions to toxic environmental hazards and address environmental justice issues. To assess how Hudson River contaminants affect individuals in different communities, outreach and education was conducted through partnerships with two New York City youth programs: The River Project Marine Biology Internship Program and Project TRUCE, a west Harlem community arts program. Within both partnerships, youths, 12-17 years were trained using the framework of Hungerford & Volk's Environmental Behavioral Model (1990). In this model, environmental awareness, knowledge, attitude and action strategies are developed through the use of variables that quantify an individual's level of environmentally responsible behavior. These categories of major and minor variables have a linear relationship with one another. Each variable is a prerequisite to the next, where individuals must first achieve sensitivity and be cognizant of the existence of the issues to then acquire in depth knowledge and begin to create environmental action strategies. Participants were engaged in outdoor environments, conducted research projects, and produced community resources. They gained ownership of their knowledge and attitudes and trust in environmental information through personal experiences and communication with individuals such as local anglers, scientists, educators, and other high school students living in their communities. Through the use of the Environmental Behavioral Model, participants were able to gain a sense of responsibility for their community and attained the skills that are needed to address the consequences of their own actions. The use of community based environmental health education is relevant to community based research initiatives. It allows researchers to frame their health and exposure hypotheses on the perceptions and concerns of the individuals being affected directly by the exposure. We plan to continue to support these partnerships to assess how these community-based youth programs can serve to develop a cadre of trained individuals who can assist in the design, conduct and implementation of the goals of the SBRP and other environmental health-related programs.